

## COUNTRY LIFE IN MERRIE ENGLAND.

BY THEO. LEDYARD CUYLER.

"The stately homes of England,  
How beautiful they stand!  
Amidst their tall ancestral tress,  
O'er all the pleasant land!  
The deer across their green swards bound,  
Through shade, and sunny gleam,  
And the swan glides past them with the sound  
Of some rejoicing stream."

THE traveller who would see England in the most favourable light must spend much of his time in the rural districts. By doing this he can not only have an opportunity of admiring her natural beauties heightened by the magnificent park scenery, but at the fireside of the hospitable country house he can see in their full development the finest traits of English character. In the cities he is always annoyed with noise and coal smoke, with filth and loathsome beggary, with late hours, formal dinners, foppery, pride of caste and a hundred other unpleasant things from which country life is in a great measure free. The exterior of the cities is sombre and forbidding—with a decided tendency to the "blues"—and even the princeliest mansion in St. James Street with all its marble, and balconies, and sumptuous hangings, would be—to me—but a poor substitute for a broad old manor house with velvet lawns, and magnificent oaks—the oldest royal family in the land.

Of these glories of English rural life, I had dreamed ever since I was old enough to read the 'Lady of the Manor,' and when in process of time I came to 'Bracebridge Hall' and the scores of other books of travel, my desire became intense to see for myself this modern Arcadia. You may be sure, therefore, that I set off, soon after my arrival in England, for a visit among the hills of Yorkshire with about the same feeling that a schoolboy mounts the stage coach for a Christmas vacation. My route thither was by steam, and lay through the manufacturing towns, where my eyes were, as usual, greeted with the same array of spectral beings clamoring for bread; and the same interminable rows of prison-houses, in which poor pale children are doomed to stand day after day, amidst the roar of wheels and spindles, until their young limbs ache for "the narrow house, and the long sleep." Just at evening we came to the valley of the Don reaching up to Sheffield. Before us, the whole heavens were illuminated with the furnace fires which burn day and night, reminding one of the vale of Tophet. In the centre was one tremendous chimney tossing its flames far up into the murky air, and casting a lurid glare on all the surrounding landscape. This fire could be distinctly seen from the house where I afterwards stayed, and I asked the gentleman of the house one day how long it had been burning? He coolly re-

plied, "*Ever since I was a boy.*" I thought of the fire that never dies.

On the other side of Sheffield are a series of green sloping hills, stretching away towards Derbyshire, and one of the innumerable stuccoed cottages sprinkled all over them, became my *English home* for a number of weeks. The hospitable owner received me with a hearty English welcome. A letter of introduction always insures a kind reception here, or at least, *did* in every case of my own experience: and without them, the doors of society are strictly barred.

As soon as I had settled myself in my new home, I was struck with what must strike every man coming from a new, *unfinished* country like ours to an old established country like England, and that is the perfect *order* of every thing out doors and in—in the arrangements of the house, and the grounds,—the servants—the style of living—the rules of intercourse—and every part and parcel of domestic life. That the exterior of English life should be all that is beautiful and tasteful is no wonder. That the walks should be smooth—the hedges clipped—the velvet grass rolled into most faultless evenness—the trees trimmed and the house most neatly adorned—is a very necessary result of abounding wealth coupled with exceeding cheapness of labour. In fact, it is the business of the numerous paupers and unoccupied labourers in that country to look about constantly to find something out of order, in the hope of getting a few pence for 'setting it to rights.' If a sprinkle of snow falls during the night you are beset next morning by a score of half starved men begging for the privilege of sweeping your walks. If any thing is to be done there, there is always somebody at your elbow to do it. When I alighted from the coach at the gate, I found a poor boy waiting with his cart to take my trunk to the door, and he told me that he had dragged his cart and kept up with the coach for a mile in order to get a penny or two for himself and a sick mother. Surely the 'glory' of England is exceeding glorious, but her 'shame' is deeply and darkly shameful.

I have spoken before of the rare beauty of the park scenery. This is owing in a great measure to the constantly rich *green* of the grass and the foliage. The climate is moist, and there is no torrid sun to

the leaves into a premature deadness, but even in November the face of the country is greener and fresher than with us in June. By incessant clipping the grass too is made to grow much thicker, which adds to its brightness, so that whenever I was riding along on a mail coach I felt a strong tendency to get off the coach, leap over the hedge, and lie down on the velvet turf and roll! Reader, excuse this expression—unless you have rode yourself through an English park. The houses here are usually of brick covered with a cream-coloured stucco—sometimes of stone, but never of wood. Their styles are as various as the tastes of their owners. Some are of the Elizabethan order with high gables, pointed windows and curiously carved doorways; some are miniature Chinese pagodas; while many more are simple square boxes covered with a broad flat roof extending far beyond the cornice, and looking like a West India hat. Ten to one but there will be a vine creeping over the door, and an old oak or two in the lawn, and—if it be a 'place' of any pretension—a troop of deer lying quietly in the shade.

So much for the exterior; the internal arrangements are equally well ordered. As Mr. Cooper has well observed, "nothing here is at sixes and sevens." Labour is so cheap that an abundance of servants is always to be had for a moderate sum. These are generally tidy and obliging, and well qualified for their duties: in fact the competition is so great, that they would lose their places if they were not so. In our own country of comparative equality, where there are no fixed ranks, it is impossible that there should ever be such servants as in England. The English complain of the *rudeness* of our servants; but the gentleman with whom I stayed, who had visited America, viewed the subject in the true light when he said "he was glad to find the labouring classes in any country in such good circumstances that they could sometimes afford to be saucy." In England they never can. The delightful description furnished by 'Mrs. Clavers' of the familiar manners of our Western "helps" have been widely read here; and many a dinner table have I set into a perfect roar by an account of that modest damsel who thrust her head in the door and shouted "Miss Clavers! was that you hollered? I thought I heerd a yell!"

Among the indispensable comforts of an English home are good horses to ride, good books to read, good coal to burn, good servants to attend upon you, and above all good dinners to eat. All these things we had in abundance. The dinner was the all-important thing, however. A dignity and interest is attached to this latter ceremony there, which we Yankee utilitarians—who eat merely to live—know nothing about. It must be served up at a certain time, and the roast-beef must be 'done to a turn,' or the Englishman is completely 'unhinged' for a fortnight.

When you present a note of introduction here, if your new friend intends to 'honour the draft' upon his hospitality, he will give you a dinner party, and this will be no trifling affair, in either trouble or ex-

pense. In France it has been well said that a lady can give a splendid party on two lemons! But John Bull roasts his beef, and mutton and venison, and calls in his friends, and makes a long, very long meal of it. There are so many courses, so much wine-bibbing, and such a tremendous importance attached to the qualities of the eatables and drinkables, that to a man who has not made a god of his belly this bountiful hospitality is somewhat wearisome. At about seven o'clock the ladies retire to the drawing-room and the gentlemen fill up their glasses and fall into a discussion about the Tariff and the Corn laws. After discussing politics for an hour—not in the light jesting manner in which we do in America, but with a gravity becoming a subject which is there an affair of vital and lasting importance and broad distinction to all—they withdraw to the parlour, and finish the evening with a cup of tea and a muffin, with the ladies. As for these ladies themselves, we opine, they will be found very like to educated women of the same rank in America,—perhaps a trifle more sedate. In externals they will differ exceedingly: The English married ladies will mostly look like young ladies—the young ladies will look like overgrown children. And this arises from the fact that they arrive at their full mental and physical development so much later than our ladies, and as a natural consequence endure much longer. An English girl is led in by a servant and takes her place by her mother's side during the last course of a dinner party, to be addressed as a child, when her American *cotemporary*—if we may use such a term—is "coming out" and perhaps has already concluded her first campaign of conquest. At this time the Yankee girl is by far the most beautiful: in the exquisite delicacy of complexion and form, the elasticity of step, the 'quickness' of expression and the airy gaiety of spirit she is superlative. In fact, there are no girls like the Yankee girls—the broad world over.

But when twenty years have passed away the American beauty has faded, and the English lady is just in her prime. The most beautiful women I saw in England were from thirty-five to forty. This is to be accounted for not merely from the fact that the English people are more phlegmatic—live slower and live longer—but from the moist, temperate climate, which has few sudden changes and violent extremes, and which permits them at all times to take much exercise in the open air. After all, this latter is the chief reason. The English ladies ride a great deal and walk a great deal—not in gauze stockings and paper shoes—but in good substantial boots, thick enough to climb hills and ford streams in. An English lady in good health would no more think of calling her carriage to go one or two miles, than many of our American girls would think of learning to knit, while the 'ready made' could be bought at the shops; or of learning to make a pudding as long as their fathers can hire an extra cook and 'keep out of jail.'

But I cannot close this short account of my Yorkshire visit without telling how happy I was to meet

that delightful old man, *James Montgomery*, who lived close by the house of my friend. Who that has drunk in the delicious melodies of the "Christian Poet" and hung with solemn rapture over his flowing numbers would not love to see James Montgomery? My sympathies were always excited for him when I knew that he was one of those meek Christians, the Moravians, and that he spent a long time in prison on account of the liberal tendency of his early writings. He is now a regular attendant upon the established church, and is living comfortably on a pension.

I called upon him soon after my arrival, in company with my friend, and was warmly received. He is a trim little man with coal black eyes and a few white locks left upon his aged head—for he is now over seventy. He spoke of America with great warmth, and was gratified to learn that even our children here are familiar with his productions. I found him very sensitive in regard to his would-be rival Mr. Robert Montgomery of Glasgow, who, as

the old man insists, is trying to steal his reputation. This Robert Montgomery is the author of the "Messiah," "Satan," and various other poems, and is the man whom Christopher North and Macaulay have pelted with such overpowering ridicule. Robert is constantly publishing, and the elder Montgomery frequently receives letters from some simple-hearted friends who don't know their Christian names (or much about poetry either), congratulating him on the success of his efforts, and assuring him that "they are the *best* he has ever written!" I don't wonder he is provoked.

While conversing with the gentle old man I found myself often repeating in my mind some of his favourite little pieces, and wondering whether he were really the author of those beautiful things which I love so much. Long may the aged pilgrim linger here, to listen to children's voices lisping his sweet hymns, and to receive the grateful thanks of the church of God which he has so long adorned and blessed.